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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [OSCE](#) [UNSC](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA MISSILE INCIDENT: RUSSIA ISSUES ITS OWN
EXPERTS REPORT, EXPECTS OSCE ACTION

REF: USOSCE 337

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Alice Wells.
Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

¶1. (C) MFA acting Department chief Tarabrin described to us a report compiled by Russian experts "proving" that Russia had nothing to do with the August 6 missile launch on Georgia. The report is being distributed in the UNSC and OSCE. We assured Tarabrin the U.S. considers all information, but the Russian report does not undermine the conclusions of the international experts. We hoped Russia and Georgia would resume normalizing relations. Tarabrin said the incident had ruined a planned Saakashvili visit, but Georgian State Minister Bakradze will visit soon and talks may take place on water, wine and agricultural imports. Since the Russians have publicized their report, it is natural for the international experts to present their findings to the OSCE. However, trading accusations will not reduce tensions, nor prevent a repetition of this provocation. We need to focus the two sides on normalization. END SUMMARY

Russian Experts Report

¶2. (C) We approached MFA 4th CIS Department Acting Director Dmitriy Tarabrin August 22 to ask about next steps in the reaction to the August 6 missile incident. We stressed that it important to renew the process of improving Russian-Georgian relations and reducing tensions, while at the same time preventing future incidents.

¶3. (C) Tarabrin said the Russian experts' group had completed a report which Russia had distributed in the OSCE and UNSC. It echoed the press conference the experts gave in Tbilisi (available in English on the MFA website, www.mid.ru). Its main points:

-- The Georgian radar read-out is open to question as it omits tracks of other planes flying on the zone of radar coverage and shows only a straight flight, omitting the turn that observers saw. It quotes the Georgian PKF commander, Kurashvili, as denying the existence of such a flight.

-- The report cast doubt on the evidence of the missile remains, saying the physical evidence from the impact is not consistent with what would have survived a launch, and where the pieces would have been. The Russians agree that Georgian SU-25s could not have launched the missile -- but say they

could have carried it and dropped it.

-- The report maintains that many of the parts of the missile did not belong to a Kh-58, especially one panel written in English. It maintains that some parts appear to have been separated with a metal and show corrosion, indicating they were cut some time ago.

-- The report maintains that Georgian military and officials (including the President) approached close to the missile in a manner inconsistent with behavior towards unexploded ordnance.

Tarabrin suggested that the Georgians manufactured the incident to "divert the public's attention from the difficult situation in Georgia" in the run-up to the Georgian presidential and parliamentary elections.

14. (C) We dismissed the electoral angle, noting that Saakashvili needs no such help in getting re-elected. We replied that the U.S. has looked at all the evidence and, while questions remain regarding all versions of the incident, the Russian report does not provide alternative answers or undermine the U.S. conclusion that the two groups of international experts got it essentially right. If the Russians have distributed their report in the UNSC and OSCE, it must expect similar airing of the international experts' findings in those venues. Tarabrin said the "case is closed" in the UNSC, but expected, "unfortunately," some further activity in the OSCE. Tarabrin also called into question the mandate of the OSCE's special representative, Zuzul. He said Zuzul's authority would have to be clarified before Russia decided whether to accept a visit from him. Karasin had told this to the Portuguese Ambassador August 21. We pointed out that refusing to accept him would not look good. Karasin had expressed to the German Ambassador and French Charge Russia's

"disappointment" that its "western partners" had "immediately taken the position of Georgia." The Germans and French have requested another meeting with Karasin, who will see them soon.

15. (C) We said that there is natural concern in the West about a missile landing on Georgia. Looking beyond that, however, how best to get Russian-Georgian normalization back on track? Tarabrin said the missile had disrupted Putin's invitation to Saakashvili to visit him in Sochi this month (Putin is receiving Kocharyan there on August 23). But, he said, Russia will receive Georgian State Minister Bakradze on August 30. Direct postal service will be resumed soon. Rospotrebnadzor chief phytosanitary officer Onishchenko has just written to DFM Karasin expressing his readiness to resume negotiations with the Georgians on wine, water, and agricultural imports as soon as Ambassador Chubinishvili returns to post. (Comment: Chubinishvili told us two weeks ago that Georgia is constantly demanding such meetings and never gets them. Every so often Onishchenko announces to the press that he would be ready to meet, but the meetings never take place. We'll see whether this time is any different. End Comment.) Tarabrin said atmosphere is important in the normalization of relations. He claimed the Georgians are organizing a youth march on Tskhinvali, which is provocative and dangerous.

Comment

16. (C) Russia's distribution of its experts report seems to us to render moot USOSCE's reftel request for guidance: if the Russians have told their story, the international experts should as well. But trading accusations will neither improve relations between Georgia and Russia, nor reduce tensions in the region, nor even prevent a repetition of such provocations. We cannot see Putin making major moves to improve relations with Georgia between now and the Russian presidential elections next March. At the same time, he cannot want the situation to degenerate into open conflict. Others in the Russian succession struggle may not share that

view. The U.S. needs to focus both Georgia and Russia on the advantages to both of stabilizing the relationship.
Melville